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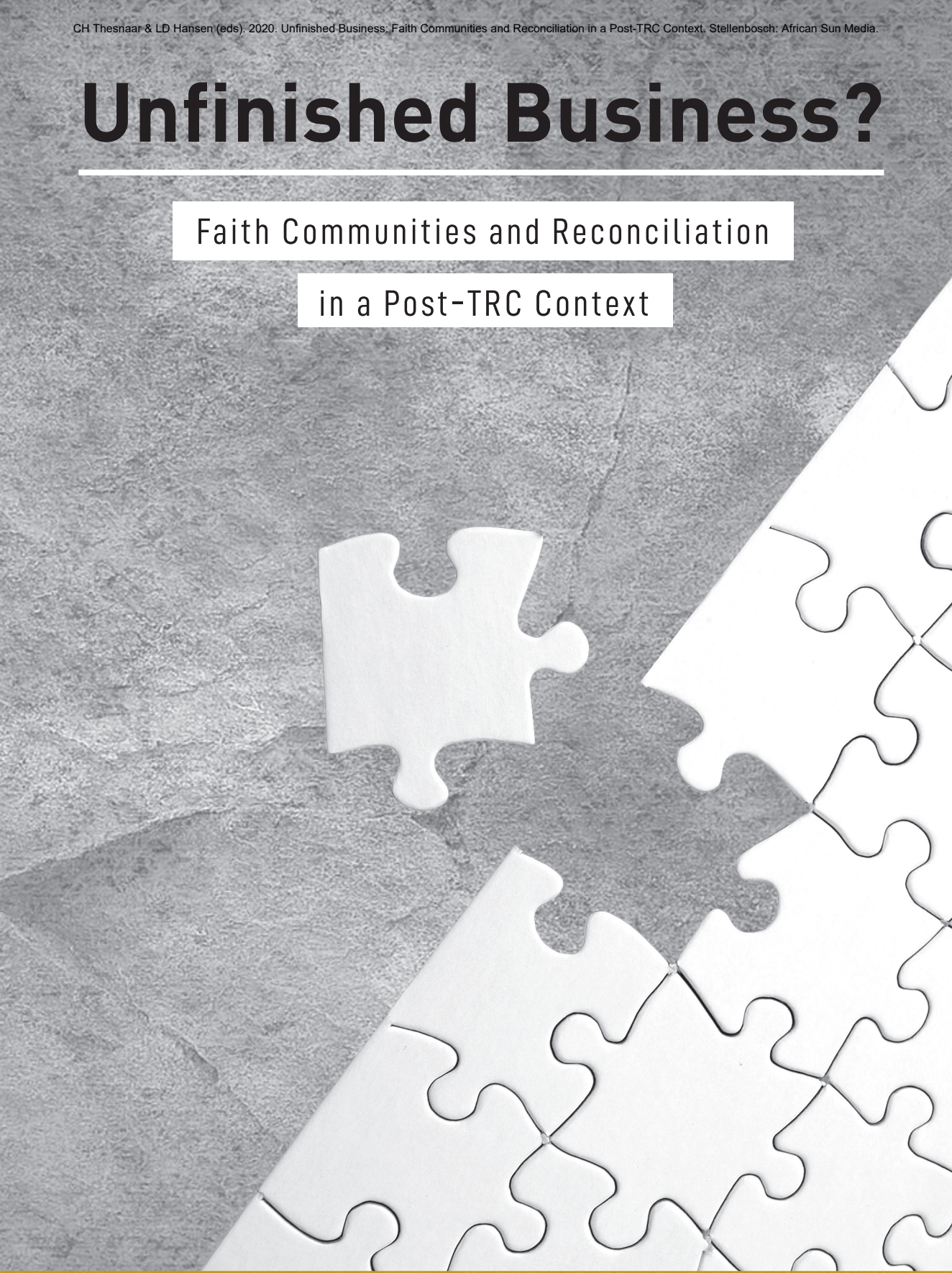
Unfinished Business?

Faith Communities and Reconciliation in a Post-TRC Context



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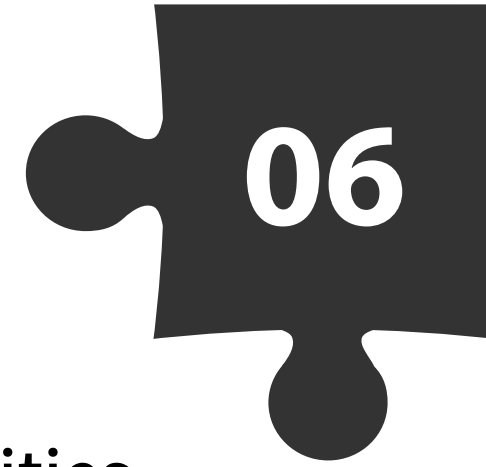

Churches, universities and the post-TRC process

Impulses from a consultation

Nico Koopman[1]

Introduction

One of the prominent aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa was to serve as a symbol, model and paradigm for the establishment of spaces where unity, reconciliation and justice can be advanced. The consultation on the impact of the TRC held in Stellenbosch in 2014 confirmed this imperative and also stimulated reflection on the state and further advancement of unity, reconciliation and justice. The latter three elements are, in fact, the topic of three articles of the Confession of Belhar (1986), wherein it is related in terms of content and structure to the threefold office of Christ. Besides churches, universities are well-placed to be one of the spaces in society where unity, reconciliation and justice may be advanced.

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This contribution, drawing on inputs of mentioned consultation, reflects on the implications for churches and universities of the mandate for a post-TRC process. It is argued that this mandate constitutes a threefold challenge, namely the challenge of royal-servant unity and social cohesion, the challenge of priestly reconciliation and social healing and, finally, the challenge of prophetic justice and social solidarity.[2] As can be inferred from this threefold description, the threefold office of Christ is appealed upon to comprehensively describe the royal-servant, priestly and prophetic roles of Christians and fellow-citizens outside the Christian tradition. As such, a brief description of the notion of the threefold office of Christ is appropriate at this point.

One of the most helpful contemporary works in Christology that focuses extensively upon the threefold office of Christ is the work of Methodist theologian, Geoffrey Wainwright.[3] Wainwright describes the threefold office as both a Reformed and ecumenical notion.

He discusses the use of the threefold office in the early church and mentions that one of the first firm and explicit uses of the threefold office was by Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century. Eusebius wished to illustrate that Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of the Old Testament and, in fact, of all religions.[4]

Wainwright also cites perspectives of other theologians of the early church – like John Chrysostom (4th century), who argued that Abraham embodied the dignities of prophet and priest and David those of king and prophet. Jesus has all three dignities – King, Prophet and Priest.[5] Wainwright also discusses the perspectives of Peter Chrysologus, 5th century bishop of Ravenna, who calls Christ the King of kings, Priest of priests and Prophet of prophets.[6]

Wainwright cites Erasmus's work on the threefold office as another example of a scattered fore-runner anticipating the eventual systematic development of the doctrine of the threefold office by Calvin.[7] Erasmus described Christ as the prophet of prophets, the priest who gave Himself as the victim to purge all the sins of those who believe in Him and the ruler to whom all power was given. Before this ruler

2 This chapter draws extensively upon, extends and contextualises earlier work of this author on the themes under discussion.

3 Geoffrey Wainwright. 1997. For our salvation. *Two approaches to the work of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 97-186.

4 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 110.

5 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 110-11.

6 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 111.

7 Wainwright, *For our salvation,* 103.

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returns as the judge, He kindly offers peace and, through His teaching, He dispels all darkness.

Wainwright refers to Martin Bucer as the most direct inspiration for Calvin's use of the doctrine of the threefold office.[8] For Bucer, Christ is the king (*rex*) who will govern us, provide all good things for us and who protects us against ill and oppression. As prophet or teacher (*doctor*), Christ teaches us the whole truth; and as a priest (*sacerdos*), Christ reconciles us with the Father eternally.

Wainwright, furthermore, affirms that Calvin laid the foundation for the extensive and systematic use of the threefold office in the Reformed tradition.[9] He states that the royal, priestly and prophetic functions among the people of God have, for the sake of their salvation, been united under their single head, Jesus Christ. Based on Calvin's work, Reformed confessions and catechetics (amongst others, the Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Confession) and Reformed dogmatists (such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heinrich Heppe, Charles Hodge, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth) gave a prominent place to the threefold office.

According to Schleiermacher, the threefold office is a necessary and adequate description of the achievements of Christ in the corporate life, i.e. the church, founded by Him. As priest of active obedience who fulfils God's law, as priest of passive obedience, who dies an atoning death and a priest who intercedes for us with the Father, Christ assumes believers into the power of his God-consciousness for the sake of our redemption; finally, as priest, Christ assumes believers into the fellowship of his unclouded blessedness for our reconciliation. Christ's prophetic work consists of teaching, prophesying and working miracles. His kingly office entails that everything that we need for our salvation and well-being continually proceeds from Him.[10]

Wainwright explains that, after Calvin, the notion of the threefold office was, amidst much suspicion, also used by some theologians in the Lutheran tradition (including Helmut Thielicke and Edmund Schlink),[11] in the Roman Catholic tradition[12] (Vatican II and, for example, Walter Kasper), to some extent in the Methodist tradition,[13] in

8 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 104.

9 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 99-103. For a helpful contemporary discussion of Calvin's systematic use of the threefold office of Christ, see Stephen Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

10 See Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 101. Later this essay will refer to critique of these views of Schleiermacher as an example of some opposition to the notion of the threefold office.

11 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 105.

12 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 106-107, 118.

13 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 107-108.

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the Orthodox tradition (amongst others, by Alexander Schmemann)[14] and in the Anglican tradition (especially by John Henry Newman, when still an Anglican).

Wainwright argues in favour of a Trinitarian understanding of the threefold office of Christ.[15] This office is Christo-centric, but not Christo-monistic. Wainwright refers to Calvin's view that it is the Father who anoints Christ with the Holy Spirit to be king, priest and prophet,[16] which he (Wainwright) formulates as "… the Holy Spirit is the Father's gift by which Christ Himself, Christians, and the church and its ministers are all anointed".[17]

Wainwright's identification of five uses of the threefold office in the theological tradition of almost two millennia affirms this Trinitarian framework of the threefold office.[18] The Christological and baptismal functions were predominant in the patristic period. The soteriological use received renewed emphasis during the Reformation. Since the nineteenth century, the ministerial and ecclesiological functions have enjoyed predominance.

The Trinitarian framework of the threefold office describes Christ's person and work in terms of their relatedness to the persons and work of the Father and the Spirit and, in terms of their relatedness to the sacraments, salvation, ministry and the church. The broad range in terms of how the Bible tells the story of God's redemptive dealings with human beings and the whole world, in and through his church, comes into the picture when one deals with the threefold office of Christ.

The Trinitarian framework also helps one to understand that all three offices are involved in both the state of humiliation and state of exaltation of Christ and in both his divine and human nature. Wainwright opts for the so-called exchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) between Christ's divine and human natures in both states of humiliation and exaltation.[19] In light of this close unity in Christ, one need not be too pedantic about the order in which to reflect upon the three offices.

Wolfhart Pannenberg raises some points of objection against the use of the categories of the threefold office.[20] Objections include that it describes the work of Christ inadequately and that it does not leave room for other offices besides

14 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 113.
15 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 118-120.
16 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 99, 106.
17 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 118.
18 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 109-117.
19 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 118-119.
20 Wolfhart Pannenberg. 1977. *Jesus. God and man.* Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 212-25.

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prophet, priest and king that were also found in the Old Testament. Pannenberg also doubts whether the name 'Christ' can be linked to all three offices and questions the idea that the Spirit anointed Jesus to these offices. He believes that none of these three offices, except to some extent the priestly office, existed consistently in Israel's history. He also does not agree with the idea described earlier, that the three offices function in both the states of humiliation and exaltation of Christ and feels the notion over-emphasises the earthly work of Christ.

The criticism of the notion of the threefold office from the perspective of feminist and postcolonial thinking is important, especially when one tries to discern the significance of this office for contemporary, complex public life.

North American theologian Joerg Rieger, for example, offers some strong opposition to the continued use of the three offices of Christ in contemporary contexts. Rieger argues that there is room for the continued use of the threefold office of Christ only on condition that Christian faith is liberated from the misuse of these offices to legitimise and support traditional and contemporary empires. Contemporary empires in post-colonial contexts need to be acknowledged, exposed and opposed.

In the end, Rieger does not reject the notion of the threefold Christ, but he pleads for a nuanced use thereof that portrays Christ as a resisting and transforming Christ. Especially in so-called Western theological circles, one may not find Rieger's criticism of the theological employment of the threefold office completely convincing. However, his plea to interpret the threefold notion in terms of its potential of resisting dehumanisation, ecocide, injustice and oppression, as well as in terms of its potential for actualising dignity in the context of the integrity of creation, justice and freedom, should be taken seriously.[21]

With this historical background in mind, especially also the points of critique against of the notion of the threefold office, one may turn to explore the potential of the threefold office for guiding and inspiring the involvement of, in particular, South African churches, in the quest for human rights, dignity and inclusion.

21 John Caputo's little book also pleads for a fresh and liberating look at the Person and work of Christ. See John D. Caputo. 2007. *What would Jesus deconstruct? The good news of postmodernism for the church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. In an interesting reflection on Christology and ethics, Reformed theological ethicist James Gustafson offers a description of the work of Christ which might illuminate our discussions on the public and ethical import of the threefold office of Christ. He portrays Christ as the Lord who is creator and redeemer, and as the sanctifier, justifier, pattern/example and teacher. See James M. Gustafson. 1968. *Christ and the moral life*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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Because we were baptised into Christ by the Spirit,[22] since we are also anointed by the Spirit[23] and because of our redemption and restoration in Christ,[24] we participate in the prophetic, priestly and royal-servant work of Christ. Wainwright, therefore, suggests baptism into Christ, anointing by the Spirit, redemption and restoration in Christ as the pathway to our participation in the threefold office of Christ. Thereby he brings Christology, ecclesiology and ethics together.

The church in all its forms is challenged to fulfil this threefold responsibility to enhance dignity, rights, justice, freedom, equality and inclusion. And the church is challenged to do this in collaboration with various individuals and institutions of society, especially civil society, but also the media, business and political authorities. To my mind, universities, too, are crucial partners in this holy quest.

Royal-servant unity and social cohesion

The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 31, describes the kingly office of Christ as follows: "… our eternal King, who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us."

Wainwright argues that the royal servant office teaches contemporary societies about authority, freedom, power and hope. Unity and social cohesion prevail where we are united in authority, united in freedom, power and hope. In a world that seeks autonomy and, in the process, aims at becoming deistic and eliminate any idea of divine action and rule, the plea is not to burn down the house of authority and not to bring down the Scriptures, creeds, liturgies and institutions of the admittedly imperfect historic church.[25]

In a society hungry for cultural freedom and an absolute right of self-expression, this office calls for recognition that my neighbour is, put in the negative, the limit of my freedom and, in the positive, a personal call to service. Lastly, Wainwright mentions that this office assures us of ultimate hope in the exalted Lord and King.

In the South African context, this office might be employed to decontaminate imperialistic notions of power that seem to threaten the idea of the servant power that is characteristic of power in the democratic vision with its central words like 'minister' that means servant and the word 'president' that means the one that

22 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 114.
23 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 99.
24 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 113.
25 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 169-171.

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presides, that one serves as an example amongst the servants, the servant par excellence. More than that, the *Christocracy* tells of a Lord, a King, who is Shepherd and the most humble of servants. Simultaneously, this office calls disciples to fulfil their calling as citizens to a public life of respecting authority and living responsibly, in the church and all walks of life.

The royal servant calling also entails that the life of freedom is defined as a life of freedom from bondage and freedom for a life of service. This view of freedom provides appropriate guidelines and parameters for developing a human rights culture, specifically to advance freedom and justice rights, and also to obey the call to freedom and just responsibilities.

The royal-servant office also prompts a life of hope. Hope can be described in a threefold manner. Hope is 'realistic hope' because it is founded in the most significant reality of all, namely the cross and resurrection, ascension and *parousia* of Jesus Christ, who is the fulfilment of the promises of God. Against this background, hope is 'responsive hope'. Therefore, hope pays attention, functions pro-actively and is expressed in concrete involvement in the matters of life. Hope is also 'resilient hope'. Despite the most challenging circumstances, 'Christian hope' perseveres with patience and fortitude.

And based on this calling, authority and hope, churches are moral communities for the formation of disciples and citizens of character and virtue. According to American theologians Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen, an etymological study of the word 'character' indicates that character has to do with the engraving of particular principles into a person.[26] The authors refer to the Greek roots of the word that means engraving tool and, by extension, refer to the marks made by an 'engraving tool'. Hence, character carries with it the notion of values that are engraved into a person, over time, so that it becomes assimilated, incarnated and embodied in the person. Character, like the virtues, therefore, develops over time in communion with God and other human beings.

The North American ethicist J. Philip Wogaman, offers a valuable description of virtue.[27] He describes virtue as "a disposition of the will towards a good end, as a tendency to think or behave in accordance with goodness, as a habit of the will to overcome a threat to our ultimate good". A virtue is a predisposition, a tendency, an intuition to be and to act in a specific way without prior reflection.

26 Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen. 1989. *Bible and ethics in the Christian life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 124.

27 J. Philip Wogaman. 1989. *Christian moral judgment*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 29.

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One acts according to it almost instinctively. It, to some extent, has an element of unavoidability to it. The Greek word for virtue, *arête,* refers to the divine power that we have to be and to act in accordance with goodness. Virtue also has the dimension of *habitus*, implying that virtue is acquired in the process of consistent and collective habitual behaviour. For David Cunningham,[28] virtues are dispositions that God has by nature, and in which we participate by grace. Virtues are characteristics of the Triune God that are bestowed upon us freely.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle identified four so-called cardinal virtues. Cardinal is derived from the Latin word *cardo* that refers to the hinge of a door. The four cardinal virtues are, therefore, the hinge on which all virtues turn. These virtues are justice, moderation/self-control, discernment/wisdom and courage/fortitude. Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas added three so-called theological virtues to these four, namely faith, hope and love.

Social thinkers in various parts of the world argue that democracies with human rights cultures that serve the common good cannot become a reality without leaders and citizens of civic virtue and character. Societies hunger for people of public and civic virtue: 'public wisdom' in contexts of complexity, ambiguity, tragedy and *aporia* (dead-end streets); 'public justice' in the context of inequalities and injustices on local and global levels; 'public temperance' in contexts of greed and consumerism amidst poverty and alienation; 'public fortitude' amidst situations of powerlessness and inertia; 'public faith' amidst feelings of disorientation and rootless-ness in contemporary societies; 'public hope' amidst situations of despair and melancholy; 'public love' in societies where public solidarity and compassion are absent.

Priestly reconciliation and social healing

The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 31, also describes the priestly office of Christ and does so as follows: "… our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of his body has redeemed us, and ever lives to make intercession for us with the Father …"

In his contemporary hermeneutic for the priestly office, Wainwright argues that Christ the Priest replaces our pain and suffering, expressed in alienations, with reconciliation and He replaces our sin and guilt, expressed in estrangement, with atonement.[29] Christ restores us to divine communion and communion with each

28 David S. Cunningham. 1998. *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology the Practice of Trinitarian Theology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 123.

29 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 150-153.

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other. Wainwright also spells out the concrete and public forms that cry out for this reconciliation, atonement and restored communion:

> ... oppression is political alienation, for the disenfranchised are deprived of the privileges and responsibilities that go with the human vocation to live in society; poverty is economic alienation, for the impoverished are cut off from their share in the fruit of the earth that humankind is charged by God to cultivate; sickness is physical alienation, and a troubled mind is psychological alienation, and both remove the sufferers from the flourishing existence which God envisioned for his human creatures; slavery is alienation of identity, the profoundest infraction of the dignity of every child of God; bereavement displays death as the alienation of humankind from the life of communion for which it was made.[30]

Jesus Christ, the Public Priest, entered into this human condition of alienation and estrangement. This estranged humanity is the humanity that Christ consumed, and in the words of Hans Us von Balthasar, "what had not been assumed would not have been healed."[31]

For South African churches that seek to develop priestly public theologies, the recommendations offered by Wainwright may be constructive in our context of so many manifestations of alienation and estrangement. Public theology challenges invite and inspire churches to overcome political alienation. The young South Africa democracy has a good democratic vision and policy documents in place. We, however, need to work for social solidarity, social cohesion and the joint building of social capital. We have sound macro-economic policies and practices in place, but the benefits did not reach the poor, and we still have the biggest gap between rich and poor in the world. In spite of our noble human rights principles of access to necessities, millions still are excluded from physical and mental health care. We still hurt each other based on racial, national, tribal, gender and socio-economic identities, as we do, based on identity or sexual orientation, age and disability. We even hurt nature!

The priestly office calls us to work toward overcoming these alienations, hurts and violations of dignity. It calls us to work, therefore, toward the actualisation of dignity, health, healing and restitutive reconciliation and reconciling justice.

30 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 150.

31 Quoted in Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 151.

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Prophetic justice and social solidarity

Finally, the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 31, describes Christ in his prophetic office as: "… our Prophet and Teacher who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption …"

In what he calls a "contemporary hermeneutics, interpretation and understanding of the prophetic office", Wainwright argues that the ongoing discernment of the will of God, of God's justice, might illuminate the quest in contemporary societies that which are experiencing an information explosion, to develop *sapientia* (wisdom) amidst so much *scientia* and information. And, in a context of meaninglessness and purposelessness, the ongoing discernment of God's will provides *telos*, i.e. purpose and meaning.[32]

In the prophetic discourse of public theology in South Africa, we may view our prophetic practices as witness to and participation in the life of Christ, the Prophet, who reveals the truth, the will of God, as a truth of our justification by Christ and as a truth that entails our calling to seek justice in the world. The prophetic quest is, therefore, a quest for the truth of our justification and salvation in Christ that is, in turn, expressed by justice in the world, served by *sapientia* and discernment.

Based on this understanding of prophetic Christology, ecclesiology and ethics, one might venture to suggest five modes of prophetic speaking that might serve the prophetic calling of the church well in its efforts to advance justice, especially for the most vulnerable.

Building upon, adjusting and appropriating the work of James Gustafson on the public speaking of churches, I have constructed five interdependent and complementary modes of prophetic speaking. These are prophetic speaking as envisioning, criticism, storytelling, technical analysis and participation in policymaking.[33]

Envisioning entails the spelling out of the ideal picture of a new society. The vision informs about a new and better reality. The vision also inspires a new lifestyle, new practices and new habits and virtues. The vision of a new life transforms persons and systems, individuals and societies to reflect the values and the goods of a new

32 Wainwright, *For our salvation*, 133-135.

33 James M. Gustafson. *Varieties of moral discourse: Prophetic, narrative, ethical, and policy*. Stob lectures of Calvin College and Seminary, Grand Rapids, 1988. For an extensive discussion of these five modes of prophetic speaking see Nico Koopman. 2011. Modes of prophecy in a democracy? In: H. Bedford-Strohm and E. de Villiers (eds.), *Prophetic witness. An appropriate contemporary mode of public discourse?* Theology in the public square/Theologie in der Offenlichkeit Band 1. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 181-92.

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society. South Africans from a variety of religious and secular backgrounds agree upon the vision of a society of dignity expressed through justice and freedom, as written down in the Bill of Rights of the 1996 South African Constitution.

Prophetic *criticism* refers first of all to self-criticism. Where churches fail to embody the vision of a new and transformed society, we offer self-criticism. Churches also give courageous public criticism where individuals, leaders and institutions betray this vision. Where the visionary task entails annunciation, the task of criticism entails denunciation. Where visionaries announce the liberating new, critics denounce the persistence of the oppressive old.

Prophetic *storytelling* refers to the telling of stories of pain and oppression. Storytellers give voice, especially to the pain and cries of the marginalised, outcasts and silenced people and creatures of society. Storytelling also tables hopeful and inspiring stories of victory and liberation.

Technical analysis refers to thorough analyses, with the help of appropriate experts, of complex public problems and challenges. This technical discourse facilitates more credible and adequate responses by churches to complex and sophisticated public challenges.

Policy discourse refers to the participation of churches in the quest to make, implement and monitor policies that will enhance the plight of the most vulnerable in society. This discourse, however, implies that we need to move from merely offering broad visions for public life. We also should avoid providing blueprints for policies. Churches need to provide parameters for policymaking that are less broad than visions and less specific than blueprints. The notion of middle axioms that was developed in 1937 by the Life and Work section of the later World Council of Churches might still prove helpful in this regard.[34]

Conclusion

The TRC will be remembered as a failed initiative if initiatives toward unity and cohesion, reconciliation and healing, justice and solidarity do not succeed it. Individuals and institutions in society are challenged to respond faithfully to this mandate. Universities are well-placed to make such a contribution. They are, in the final instance, institutions that nurture public and civic virtue and character. They are places that advance scientific reflection, analysis and systematisation.

34 For a discussion of the potential of middle axioms see Nico Koopman. 2010. Churches and public policy discourses in South Africa. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 136: 41-56.

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As such, universities are spaces of scientific reflection that deal appropriately with complexity. They seek simplicity on the other side of complexity, a simplicity that has wrestled with complexity in all its manifestations like plurality, ambiguity, ambivalence, duality, paradoxicality, *aporia* and tragedy. Universities are also the spaces that impact transformatively on all spheres of society, from the most intimate to the most global, planetary and cosmic.[35] The quest for unity and social cohesion, reconciliation and social healing, justice and social solidarity can be served significantly by universities. And, in this quest, we can drink from the wells of our religious and secular traditions. Christians drink from the wells of the Lord, Jesus Christ, who mandates and equips us to live royal-servantly, priestly and prophetically in the world.

35 For a very helpful discussion of the three roles of a theological school – from which some inferences can be made about the roles of universities – see David Kelsey. 1992. *To understand God truly. What's theological about a theological school?* Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox.

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